



Representative
Tom Huff

26TH DISTRICT



1997 Session Report

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Telecommunications
Oversight and Policy
Committee
State Investment Board



Inside this report:

- Education top priority in '97
- Welfare reform
- Tax relief for property owners
- Tacoma Narrows options narrowed
- Town Hall Meetings
- Your comments urgently needed

March 1997

Dear friends,

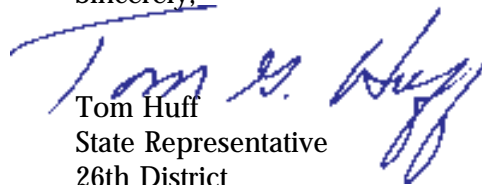
It is a tremendous honor to be in Olympia once again on behalf of the people of the 26th District. The beginning of the 1997 session brings with it many new faces: a new governor, a new Republican majority in the Senate, and 24 new colleagues in the House of Representatives.

The business at hand, however, is all quite familiar. We are working on many important issues over this 105-day session--most of which fall under the category of unfinished business. We have already made progress and will continue to work on providing meaningful tax relief for property owners. We are proposing much-needed reforms to our existing welfare and juvenile justice systems, looking for solutions to meet our transportation needs, and revisiting the challenges of growth management.

As chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, I will be working to craft a two-year operating budget that is fair to the taxpayers and meets the essential needs of our state. I am encouraged by the commitment of everyone to work in a collaborative manner to develop solutions that are in the best interest of the people. A great deal remains to be done, but we are clear on the issues that we want to resolve, and the dialogue has been promising.

I would invite you to complete the short questionnaire on the back of this report and return it to my office. Your ideas and concerns help me to be most effective in representing you. I welcome your thoughts, and I thank you in advance for your interest.

Sincerely,


Tom Huff
State Representative
26th District



Excellence and accountability in education

Restoring accountability in our public school system is perhaps the single most important task that we currently face. In the last budget, we increased per pupil funding in K-12 education by \$139 per student, and we increased enrollment in higher education by 8,600 students. We also made significant investments in new technology that will improve

learning opportunities and provide students with relevant skills.

These are important investments in the future of our children. But at the end of the day, none of what we do in Olympia is as important as what we do in the classroom. Above all, we must ensure that we are preparing students for success in the

workforce or in pursuits of higher learning.

We want a commitment to excellence from the education community, more accountability, more parental involvement, and a safe environment for students and teachers.

The value of higher education

In the last budget, we stepped up to fund additional slots in higher education to meet a projected increase in enrollment. Yet there now may be more than 1,800 unfilled positions in our state's colleges and universities. This does not mean students are shunning education. What it means is that we need to do a better job of tracking the needs of students who are preparing for the workforce.

Not every student will be pursuing a four-year degree. Community colleges and vocational-technical schools are adapting curriculums that will give students the skills they need to offer value in the job market. The role of higher education is changing. We need to anticipate the needs of the labor market and the corresponding needs of students who want to prepare for their futures.

Welfare to work

We expect to adopt legislation this session that would restore Washington's welfare program to meet its original purpose. Over the years, welfare has been transformed from a safety net to a way of life--a life of dependency and assumed entitlement. Our bill would require welfare recipients to look for work or participate in job training. It places a reasonable five-year limit on benefits and allows recipients to save and earn

more money, which will help them end their welfare dependency.

Our proposal builds on the welfare reform package adopted by Congress last year, and is crafted to meet the specific needs of our residents. In addition to the benefits authorized by Congress, our measure provides assistance for legal immigrants who have honored and abided by our immigration laws and need a hand up on their way to achieving self-sufficiency.

Tacoma Narrows alternatives narrowed

The Department of Transportation is giving further consideration to nine alternative proposals for the SR 16/Tacoma Narrows improvement project. The remaining options include various combinations of several strategies, including bus transit, HOV lanes, ramp metering and ramp bypass lanes, SR 16 and Tacoma Narrows Bridge capacity enhancements, a second bridge, and a Gig Harbor-Tacoma ferry.

Fourteen alternatives were eliminated after the first round of evaluation, including all five options which called for north Puget Sound crossings.

The remaining options will be evaluated over the next several months.

If you have questions or would like to submit comments, you can contact the Solve 16 Project Information Office at 1-888-SOLVE16



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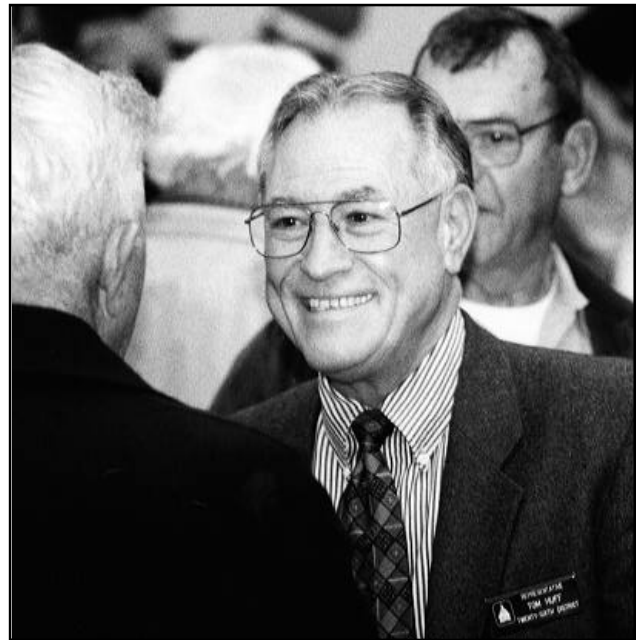
State spending: watching over your tax dollars

As the current two-year budget cycle winds to a close, this is the year when we draw up a new spending plan for the next biennium. As chairman of the Appropriations Committee in charge of writing the budget, my goal is to review the responsibilities of each agency to make sure we authorize prudent levels of spending for essential services.

There has been a lot of talk about lifting the Initiative 601 spending limit to allow for greater levels of spending in the next biennium. We will not amend or repeal Initiative 601. The people of Washington adopted this initiative in 1993 to curb state government's appetite for spending that led to a budget crisis and massive tax increases just a few

years ago. The initiative allows us to increase overall spending based on population growth and inflation. It provides for reasonable growth in the budget, and we plan to respect the people's decision.

We can adopt a budget that funds essential services and meets the requirements of Initiative 601. We can provide tax relief for property owners and businesses and still have a balanced budget that spends no more than we will take in from taxpayers.



And we can maintain our current rainy-day reserve fund of approximately \$400 million.

Tax relief for property owners

Our first order of business this session was to approve a 4.7 percent reduction in state property taxes. This was acted on quickly for two reasons. Had we not adopted this measure before the end of January, property taxes would have gone up. A previous 4.7 percent tax reduction would have expired had we not moved quickly enough to extend it beyond 1996.

Our legislation prevented the increase from occurring in 1997 and will allow voters to decide if we should permanently reduce state property taxes by 4.7 percent. Property owners should not have to count on the Legislature acting every year to avoid an increase in property taxes.

The House has also passed a referendum this session that would address the larger issue of rising

property taxes. We propose to limit future increases to the rate of inflation or 6 percent, whichever is lower.

Repeated attempts over the last two years to adopt long-term property tax relief were rejected by Gov. Lowry and the former Democrat majority in the Senate. Tax relief for Washington property owners is long overdue.

Town hall meetings

Mark your calendar for March 22, 1997. Rep. Tom Huff will be hosting two town hall meetings. During this event, you'll hear a brief report on the 1997 legislative session and there will also be an opportunity for discussion and questions.

Times and locations:

Port Orchard
10 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Givens Center
1026 Sidney Ave.

Gig Harbor
1 p.m. - 2 p.m.

Fire Dist. #5 Headquarters
10222 Bujacich Rd. NW

I look forward to seeing you!

Please
place
32¢
stamp
here



Representative Tom Huff

PO Box 40600

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Your opinion counts



Please rate the three issues that you consider to be of greatest importance, with 1 being the most important. Please provide your name and address so that I can provide you with updated information on these issues throughout the legislative session. Also, I welcome your comments and questions in the space provided below.

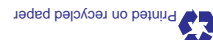
Please rate issues most important to you

- ☐ State spending
- ☐ Property taxes
- ☐ K-12 education
- ☐ Higher education
- ☐ Juvenile justice
- ☐ Welfare reform
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Growth management
- ☐ Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Comments: _____



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Olympia, WA 98504

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Tom Huff**

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